FABLES
ten years on the edge
VERTIGO X
issue 13 july 03
BILL WILLINGHAM
LAN MEDINA
CRAIG HAMILTON
SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS
jj02
verfigocomics.com

LOOK AT THIS -- BIGBY WOLF AND HIS INTREPID TEAM OF FABLES ARE IN THE MIDST OF WATERGATING TOMMY SHARP'S APARTMENT...
STEP AWAY FROM THE MAN, BLUEBEARD! AND PUT THAT DAMNED GUN AWAY.
WHY?
SINCE WE CAN'T BE CERTAIN WE'VE DESTROYED ALL OF SHARP'S FILES, WE NEED TO IMPLEMENT A MORE DRASTIC SOLUTION.
SO LET'S KILL HIM AND BE DONE WITH IT.
AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE DOWNSTAIRS, WATCHING THE DOOR?
Dirty Business
Part Two of a Two-part Caper
Written by Bill Willingham
Pencilled by Lan Medina
Inked by Craig Hamilton
Lettered by Todd Klein
Colored and Separated by Daniel Vozzo
Cover art by James Jean
Assistant Editor Mariah Huehner
Editor Shelly Bond
FABLES is created by Bill Willingham

MAYBE I DIDN'T MAKE MYSELF CLEAR. BACK OFF OR I'LL KILL YOU.
SHOW SOME BACKBONE FOR ONCE, WOLF.
YOUR NON-VIOLENT PLAN DIDN'T WORK, SO NOW WE'RE FORCED TO FALL BACK ON MORE EXTREME, BUT MORE CERTAIN MEASURES.
I'M WILLING TO DO IT, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT GETTING YOUR OWN PAWS DIRTY.
YOU CAN EVEN LOOK AWAY, IF YOU'RE REALLY SO SQUEAMISH.
MAYBE WE SHOULD GET OUT OF THE WAY.
YES, JACK--
--MAYBE YOU SHOULD.
DON'T BOTHER. SINCE NONE OF YOU HAS THE STOMACH FOR ROUGH BUSINESS, I WON'T FORCE IT.
WE'LL DO IT BIGBY'S WAY-- ASSUMING HE EVEN HAS AN ALTERNATE PLAN.

ACTUALLY, IT'S MY PLAN.
THEN IT'S SURE TO SUCCEED, JUST LIKE EVERY OTHER SCHEME YOU'VE CONCOCTED OVER THE YEARS.
CUT IT OUT.
WE'VE GOT A LOT OF WORK TO DO AND NOT MUCH TIME IN WHICH TO DO IT.
JACK, YOU AND BOY BLUE GET TOMMY SHARP READY FOR TRAVEL.
BLUEBEARD, GET BACK DOWN TO THE LOBBY, WHERE YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ALL ALONG.
THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF THE CITY COULD BE DOWN THERE BY NOW.
AND I'D STILL BE THERE IF I HAD ANY CONFIDENCE IN YOU.
SO YOU'VE MANAGED TO TELL US, AD NAUSEAM.
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU SINCE THE EXILE?
WHEN DID THEY TAME YOU?
OR WAS YOUR FORMERLY SAVAGE NATURE ALWAYS COUNTERFEIT?
A COMBINATION OF BLUSTER AND DEFT PUBLIC RELATIONS?
DARK ROOM

DON'T PUSH THIS ANY FURTHER.
OR YOU'LL RIP MY THROAT OUT, OR KILL ME, OR BLAH BLAH BLAH?
YOU'VE SAID IT ALL BEFORE, WOLF.
YOUR CONSTANT "OR ELSES" HAVE GROWN TEDIOUS.
HASN'T ANYONE TOLD YOU THAT THREATS LOSE THEIR IMPACT WHEN SO OFTEN REPEATED, WITHOUT EVER ACTUALLY ACTING ON ONE OF THEM?
I HAVEN'T NEEDED TO ACT, BECAUSE YOU'VE ALWAYS BACKED DOWN AND ALWAYS WILL.
SURE, YOU'RE A TERROR WHEN GUTTING UNARMED BRIDES ON THEIR WEDDING NIGHT, OR GUNNING DOWN AN UNCONSCIOUS MAN ON A TOILET.
YOU'RE A COWARD, BLUEBEARD, HIDING BEHIND A LIFETIME OF WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE.
NOW, UNLESS YOU'RE PREPARED TO THROW DOWN...

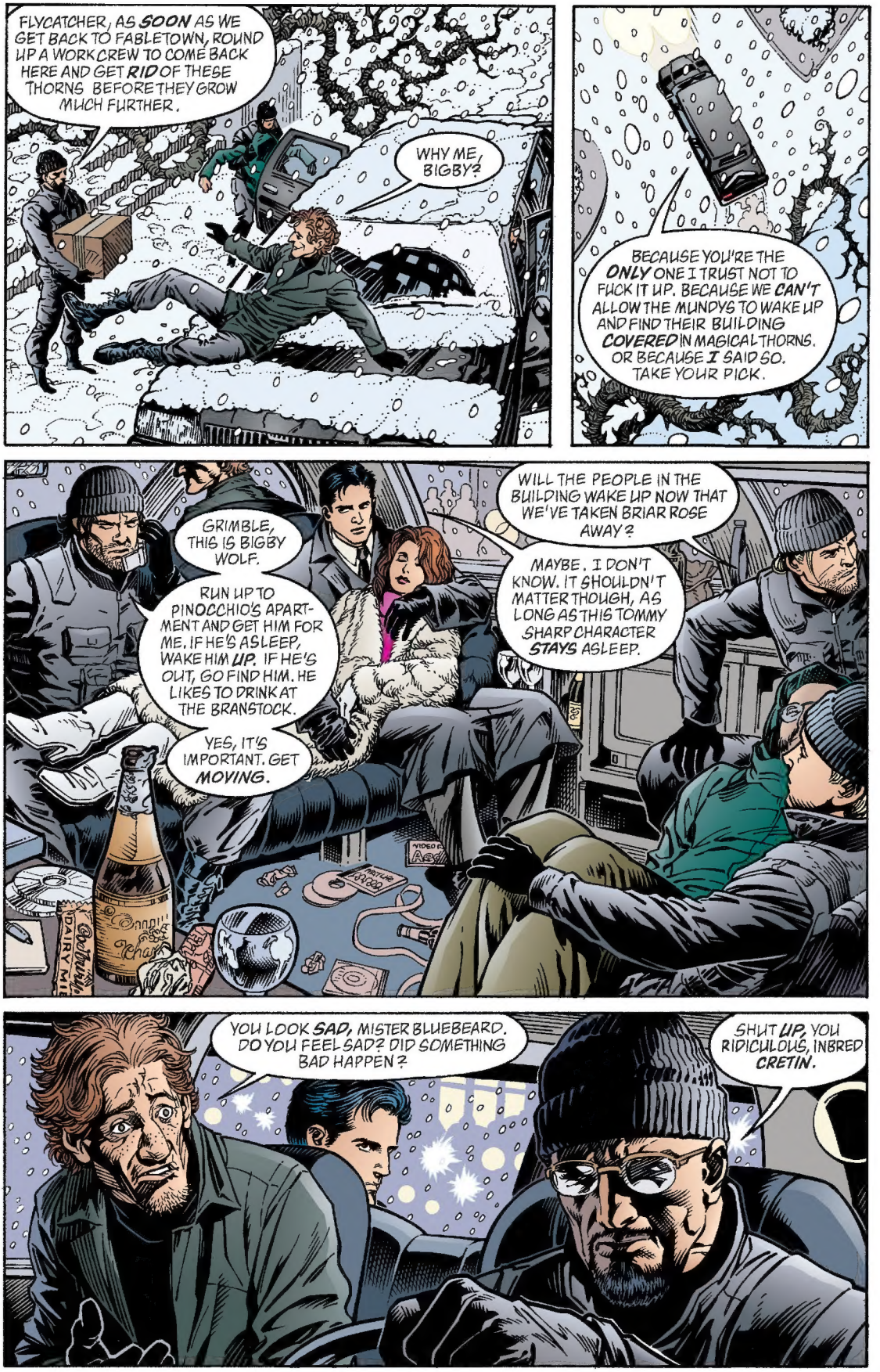
...I THOUGHT SO, TOUGH GUY.
WHEN YOU GET DONE PISSING YOURSELF WITH FEAR, TUCK TAIL AND DO WHAT I TOLD YOU TO DO.

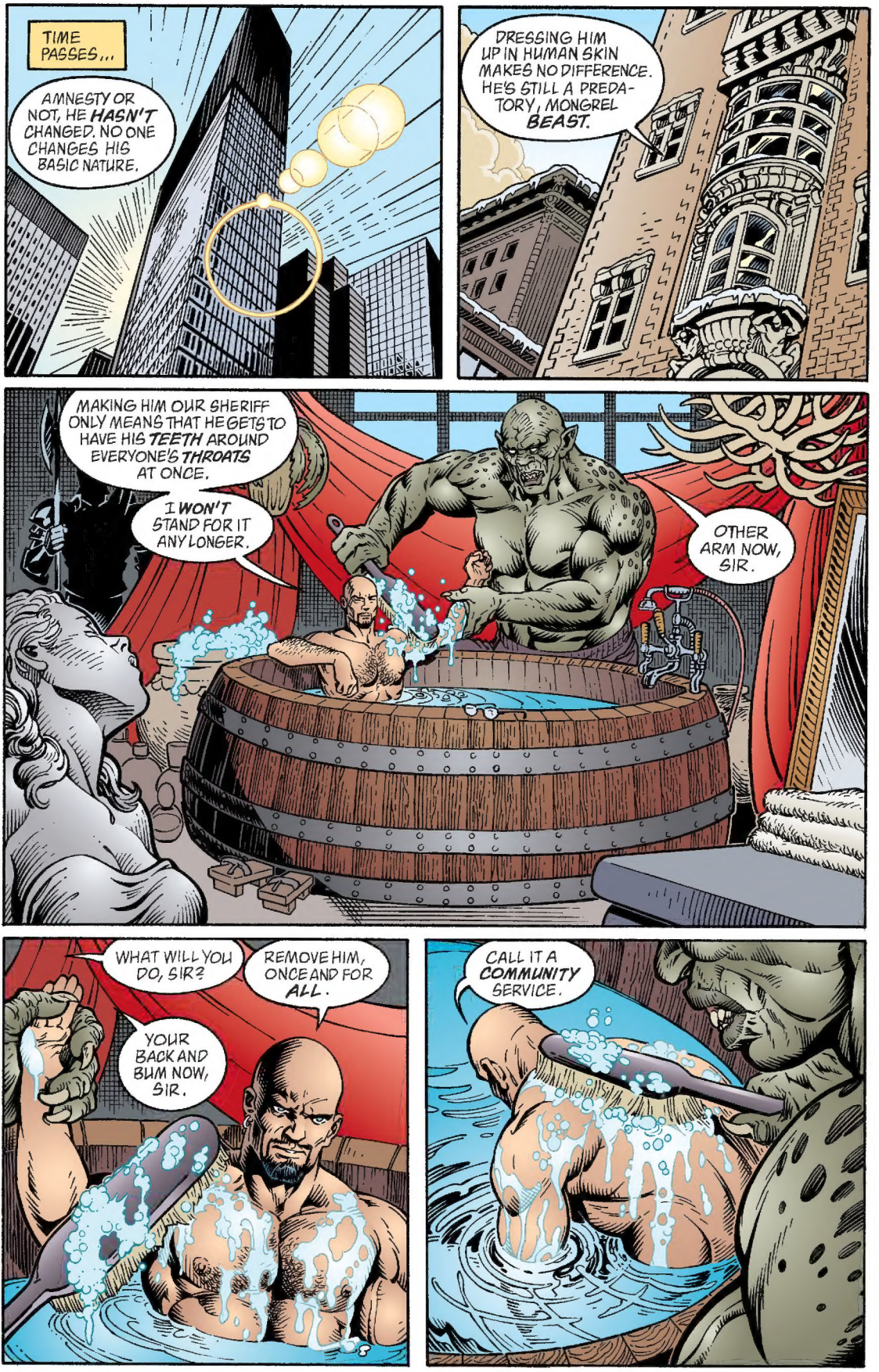
OBEY ME.

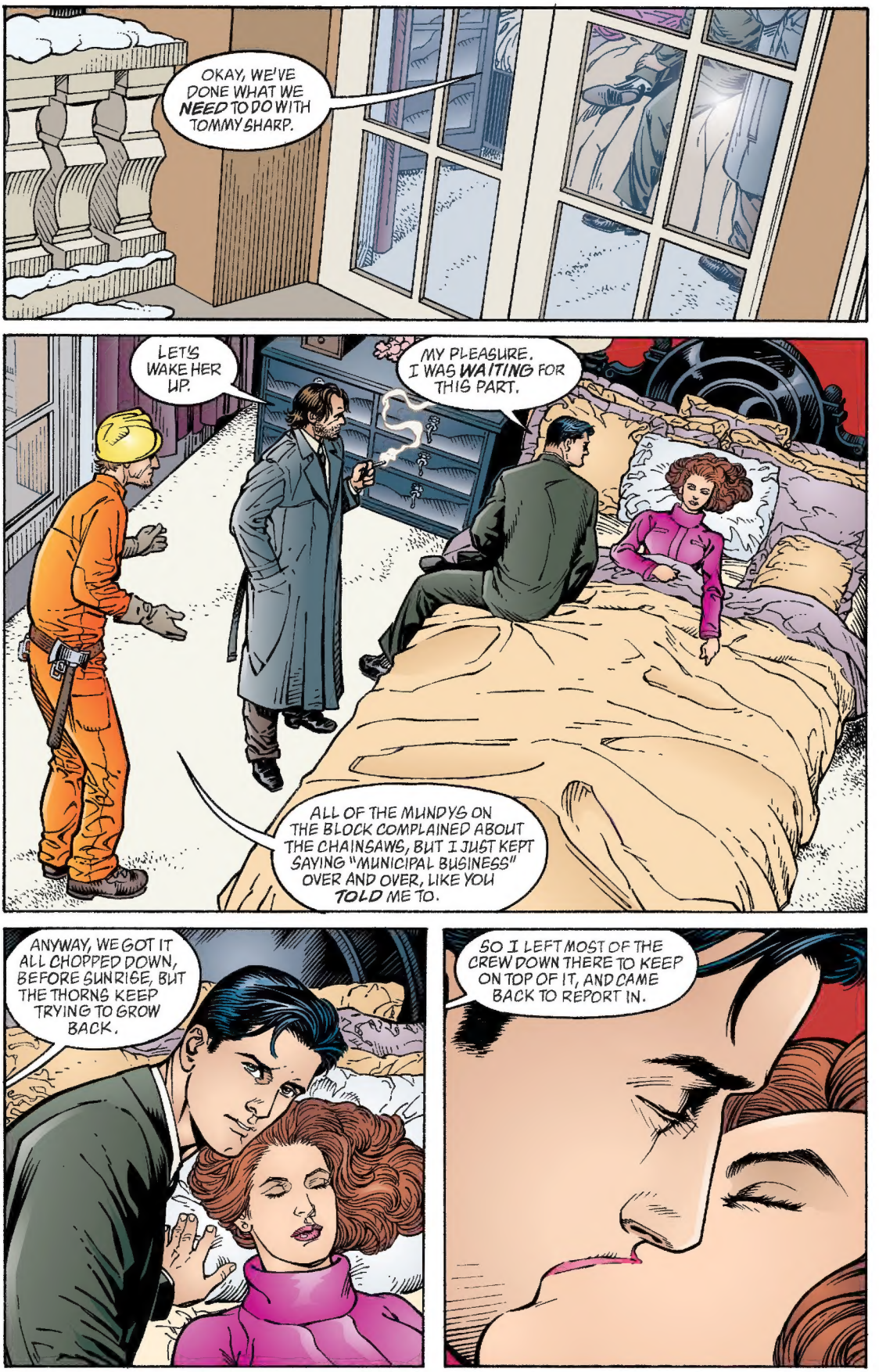
SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? PULL HIS PANTS UP, SO WE CAN GET OUTTA HERE.
I'M NOT TOUCHING HIS PANTS. YOU DO IT.

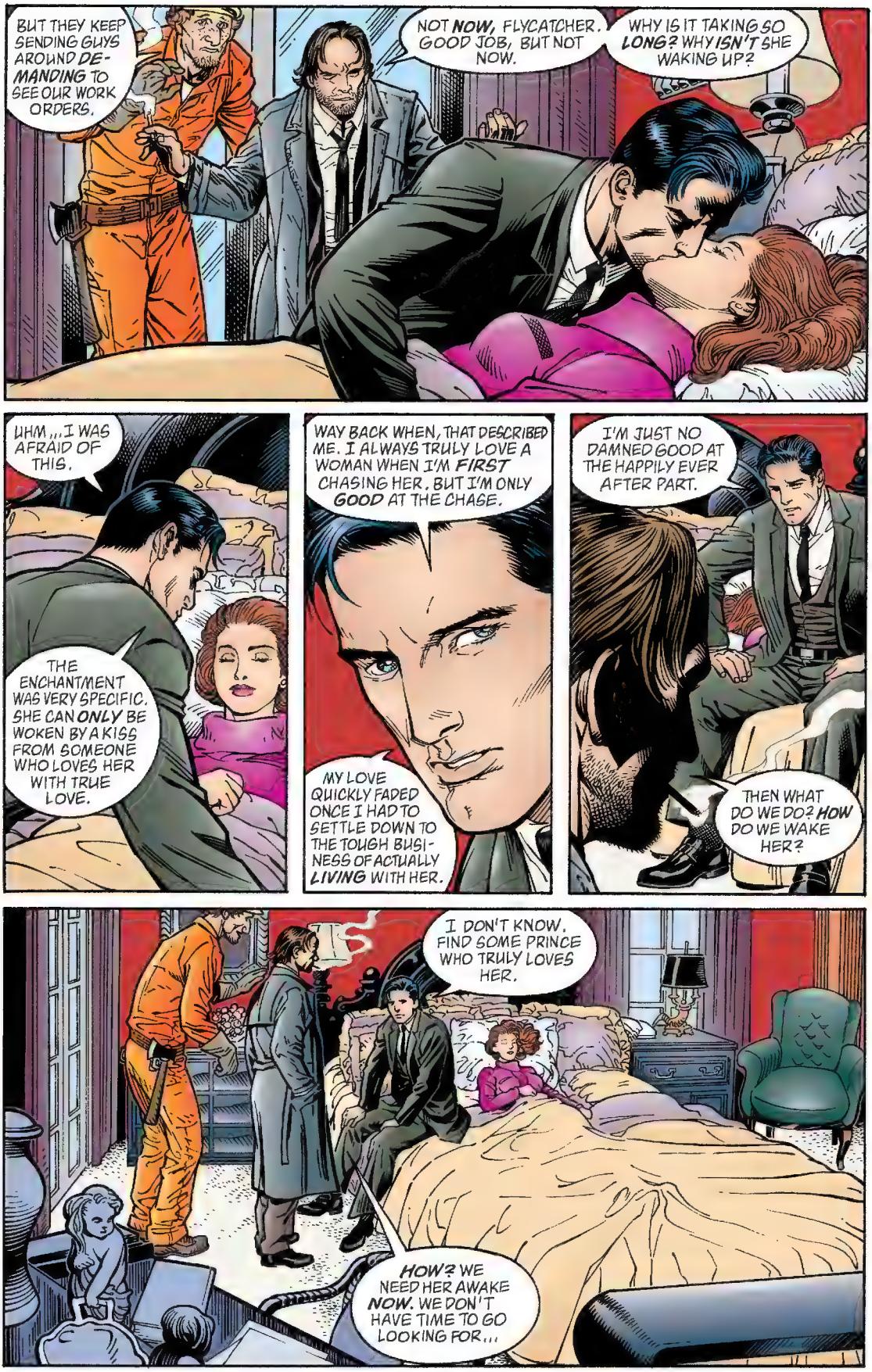
TIME TO WRAP IT UP, KIDS. WE'VE ALREADY BEEN HERE TOO LONG.

MAKE SURE WE'VE GOT EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING WE'RE TAKING WITH US.
ALL WE NEED NOW IS FOR SOME MUNDY COP TO COME ALONG AND SEE US HAULING BODIES OUT OF A BUILDING.
HOW LONG ARE THESE THORNS GOING TO CONTINUE TO GROW?
AS LONG AS BRIAR ROSE REMAINS ASLEEP, I THINK. DID SHE GAIN WEIGHT SINCE THE HOMELANDS?


FLYCATCHER, AS SOON AS WE GET BACK TO FABLETOWN, ROUND UP A WORK CREW TO COME BACK HERE AND GET RID OF THESE THORNS BEFORE THEY GROW MUCH FURTHER.
WHY ME, BIGBY?
BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I TRUST NOT TO FUCK IT UP. BECAUSE WE CAN'T ALLOW THE MUNDYS TO WAKE UP AND FIND THEIR BUILDING COVERED IN MAGICAL THORNS. OR BECAUSE I SAID SO. TAKE YOUR PICK.
GRIMBLE, THIS IS BIGBY WOLF.
RUN UP TO PINOCCHIO'S APARTMENT AND GET HIM FOR ME. IF HE'S ASLEEP, WAKE HIM UP. IF HE'S OUT, GO FIND HIM. HE LIKES TO DRINK AT THE BRANSTOCK.
YES, IT'S IMPORTANT. GET MOVING.
WILL THE PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING WAKE UP NOW THAT WE'VE TAKEN BRIAR ROSE AWAY?
MAYBE. I DON'T KNOW. IT SHOULDN'T MATTER THOUGH, AS LONG AS THIS TOMMY SHARP CHARACTER STAYS ASLEEP.
YOU LOOK SAD, MISTER BLUEBEARD. DO YOU FEEL SAD? DID SOMETHING BAD HAPPEN?
SHUT UP, YOU RIDICULOUS, INBRED CRETIN.


TIME PASSES...
AMNESTY OR NOT, HE HASN'T CHANGED. NO ONE CHANGES HIS BASIC NATURE.
DRESSING HIM UP IN HUMAN SKIN MAKES NO DIFFERENCE. HE'S STILL A PREDATORY, MONGREL BEAST.
MAKING HIM OUR SHERIFF ONLY MEANS THAT HE GETS TO HAVE HIS TEETH AROUND EVERYONE'S THROATS AT ONCE.
I WON'T STAND FOR IT ANY LONGER.
OTHER ARM NOW, SIR.
WHAT WILL YOU DO, SIR?
REMOVE HIM, ONCE AND FOR ALL.
YOUR BACK AND BUM NOW, SIR.
CALL IT A COMMUNITY SERVICE.


OKAY, WE'VE DONE WHAT WE *NEED* TO DO WITH TOMMY SHARP.
LET'S WAKE HER UP.
MY PLEASURE. I WAS *WAITING* FOR THIS PART.
ALL OF THE MUNDYS ON THE BLOCK COMPLAINED ABOUT THE CHAINSAWS, BUT I JUST KEPT SAYING "MUNICIPAL BUSINESS" OVER AND OVER, LIKE YOU *TOLD* ME TO.
ANYWAY, WE GOT IT ALL CHOPPED DOWN, BEFORE SUNRISE, BUT THE THORNS KEEP TRYING TO GROW BACK.
SO I LEFT MOST OF THE CREW DOWN THERE TO KEEP ON TOP OF IT, AND CAME BACK TO REPORT IN.

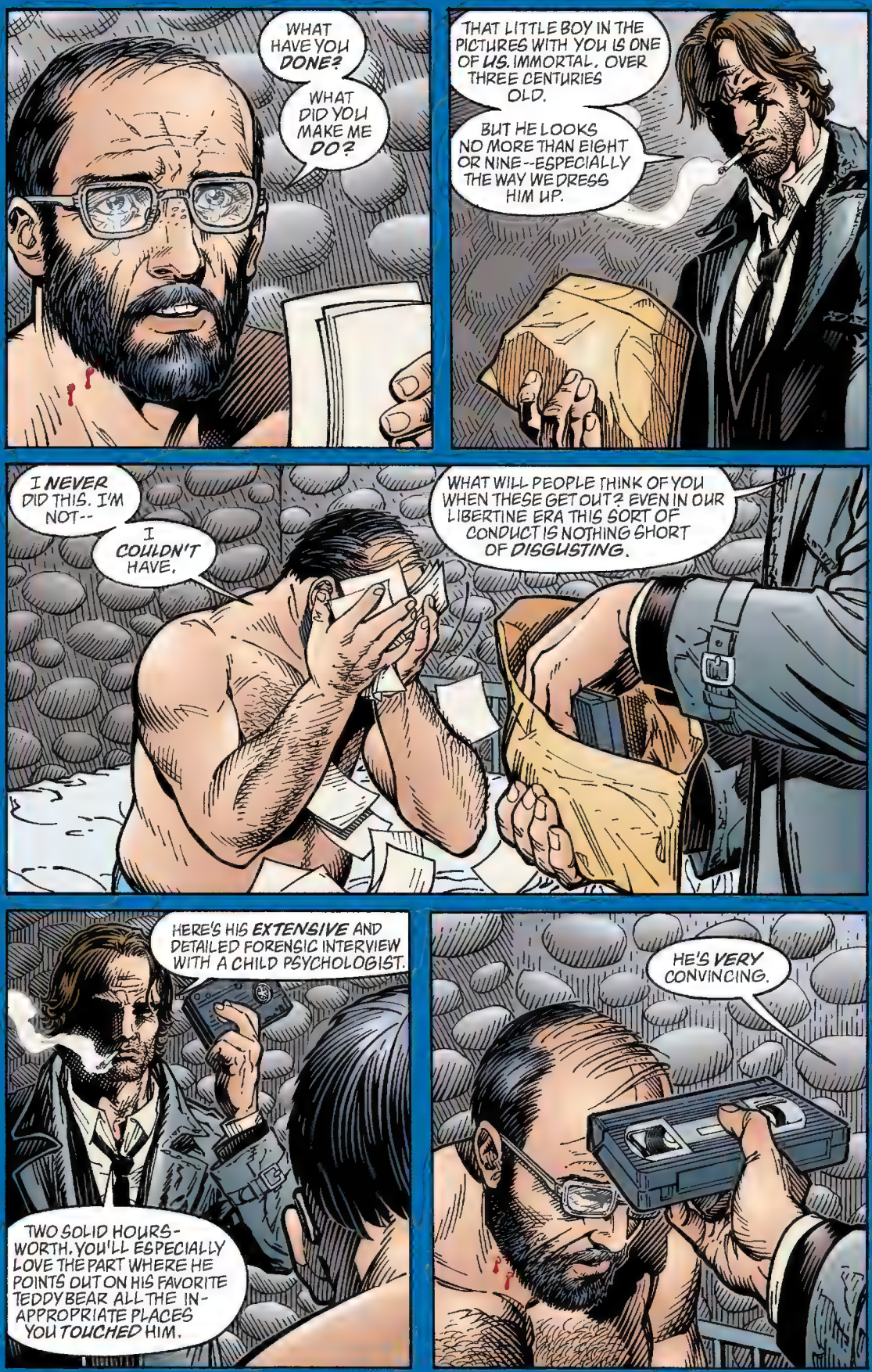

BUT THEY KEEP SENDING GUYS AROUND DEMANDING TO SEE OUR WORK ORDERS.
NOT NOW, FLYCATCHER. GOOD JOB, BUT NOT NOW.
WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG? WHY ISN'T SHE WAKING UP?
UHM... I WAS AFRAID OF THIS.
THE ENCHANTMENT WAS VERY SPECIFIC. SHE CAN ONLY BE WOKEN BY A KISS FROM SOMEONE WHO LOVES HER WITH TRUE LOVE.
WAY BACK WHEN, THAT DESCRIBED ME. I ALWAYS TRULY LOVE A WOMAN WHEN I'M FIRST CHASING HER. BUT I'M ONLY GOOD AT THE CHASE.
MY LOVE QUICKLY FADED ONCE I HAD TO SETTLE DOWN TO THE TOUGH BUSINESS OF ACTUALLY LIVING WITH HER.
I'M JUST NO DAMNED GOOD AT THE HAPPILY EVER AFTER PART.
THEN WHAT DO WE DO? HOW DO WE WAKE HER?
I DON'T KNOW. FIND SOME PRINCE WHO TRULY LOVES HER.
HOW? WE NEED HER AWAKE NOW. WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO GO LOOKING FOR...

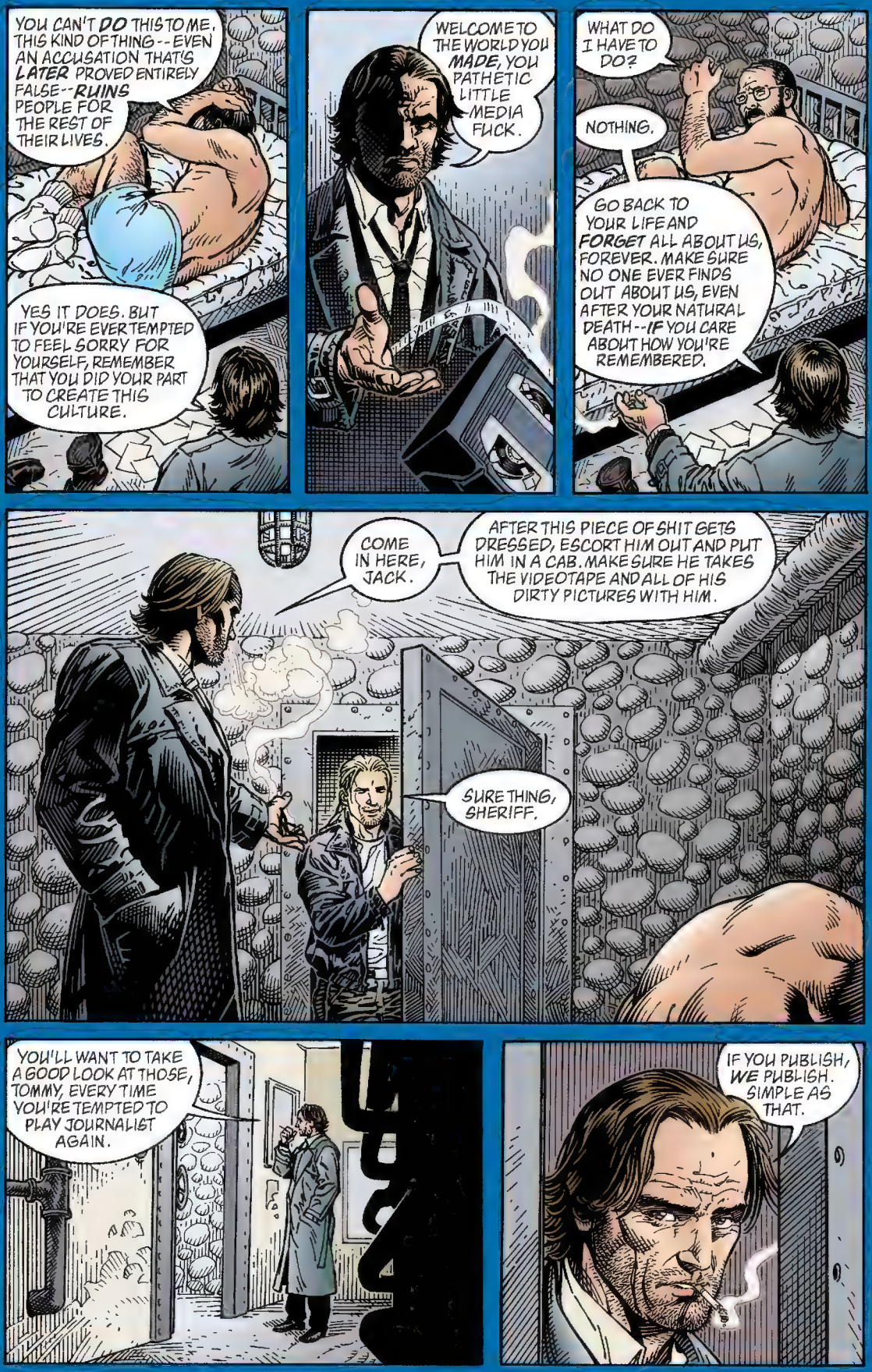
EXCUSE ME, MISTER WOLF. I COULD TRY.
NOT NOW, FLY. THIS IS GROWN-UP TALK. WE NEED TO BE SERIOUS NOW.
BUT I AM SERIOUS. YOU NEED A PRINCE AND I'M A PRINCE. MAYBE NOT A VERY HANDSOME ONE, BUT I'M AWFULLY FOND OF MISS BRIAR. I MEAN SHE'S... I TAKE ONE LOOK AT HER AND I WANT TO...
...WHO WOULDN'T?
WHAT THE HELL. WHY NOT? GIVE IT A SHOT.
ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND? HE'S AN IMBECILE!
LET HIM TRY. WHAT COULD IT HURT?
I'LL BE DAMNED. IT WORKED.
WHAT HAPPENED? UHM... HOW DID IT ALL TURN OUT? AND WHY DOES MY MOUTH TASTE LIKE BUGS?
CAN'T TALK NOW. SHARP WILL BE WAKING.

TIME TO WAKE UP, TOMMY BOY.
OH GOD, MY HEAD.
WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
I FEEL LIKE SOMEONE SLIPPED ME A MICKEY.
WHICH IS MORE OR LESS WHAT WE DID.
OH MY GOD! IT'S YOU!
HOW DID YOU GET ME? WHAT DID YOU DO?
HERE. LOOK AT YOURSELF IN THIS. LOOK AT YOUR NECK.
WHAT DID YOU SICK CREATURES DO TO ME?

YOU FIGURED OUT WE'RE VAMPIRES, TOMMY. YOU KNOW WHAT WE DID. WE DRANK YOUR BLOOD.
OH DEAR LORDY.
NOT ALL THAT MUCH. NOT ENOUGH TO CHANGE YOU INTO ONE OF US. RELAX. YOU WON'T BE GROWING FANGS OR AVOIDING ITALIAN FOOD.
BUT NOW WE'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP TABS ON YOU, AND CONTROL YOU IF WE HAVE TO. YOU'VE SEEN THE MOVIES, YOU KNOW HOW THAT WORKS.
I ONLY WANTED A BIG STORY. I DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING.
YOU TRIED TO SELL US OUT FOR A FEW DAYS OF FLEETING NOTORIETY. WE DON'T ALLOW THAT SORT OF THING.
WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO WITH ME?
NOTHING, AS LONG AS YOU BEHAVE. BUT IF YOU EXPOSE US, WE'LL MAKE YOU DO SOMETHING FATAL TO YOURSELF. HANG YOURSELF. SLIT YOUR WRISTS IN THE BATH.
WHATEVER STRIKES OUR FANCY AT THE TIME, WE'VE TASTED YOUR BLOOD. YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO RESIST US.

I WASN'T TRYING TO HURT YOU PEOPLE. I LIKED YOU. I DID. I'VE BEEN GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER TO YOU FOR THREE YEARS. LEARNING YOUR STORIES AND RELATIONSHIPS.
BUT IT WAS SUCH A BIG STORY.
IT'S NO STORY AT ALL NOW. AND SHARPIE, IF YOU'VE ALREADY SENT IT TO SOMEONE...
...IF ANY PART OF YOUR STORY GETS OUT, EVEN FROM SOMEONE ELSE, WE'LL DO MORE THAN KILL YOU.
WE'LL DESTROY YOUR REPUTATION. WE'LL MAKE YOUR KIDS, YOUR FAMILY AND BOTH OF YOUR EX-WIVES DETEST YOU.
AND ALL YOUR LOYAL READERS, TOO.
WH-WHY? HOW? WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
LOOK AT THESE. KEEP THEM IF YOU LIKE. WE'VE GOT COPIES.
AGPA
OH NO.

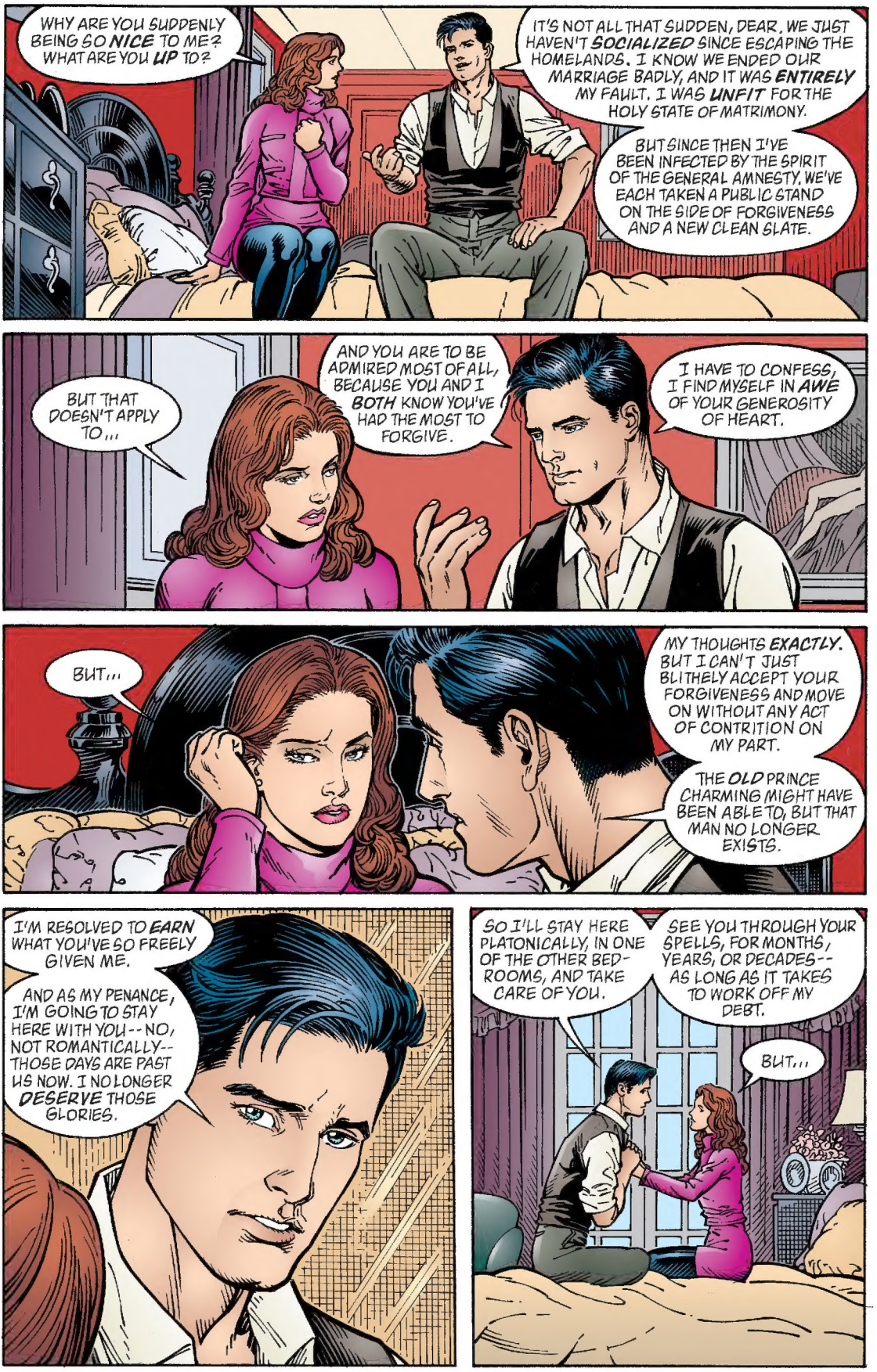

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
WHAT DID YOU MAKE ME DO?
THAT LITTLE BOY IN THE PICTURES WITH YOU IS ONE OF US. IMMORTAL, OVER THREE CENTURIES OLD.
BUT HE LOOKS NO MORE THAN EIGHT OR NINE--ESPECIALLY THE WAY WE DRESS HIM UP.
I NEVER DID THIS. I'M NOT--
I COULDN'T HAVE.
WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK OF YOU WHEN THESE GET OUT? EVEN IN OUR LIBERTINE ERA THIS SORT OF CONDUCT IS NOTHING SHORT OF DISGUSTING.
HERE'S HIS EXTENSIVE AND DETAILED FORENSIC INTERVIEW WITH A CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST.
TWO SOLID HOURS-WORTH. YOU'LL ESPECIALLY LOVE THE PART WHERE HE POINTS OUT ON HIS FAVORITE TEDDY BEAR ALL THE IN-APPROPRIATE PLACES YOU TOUCHED HIM.
HE'S VERY CONVINCING.

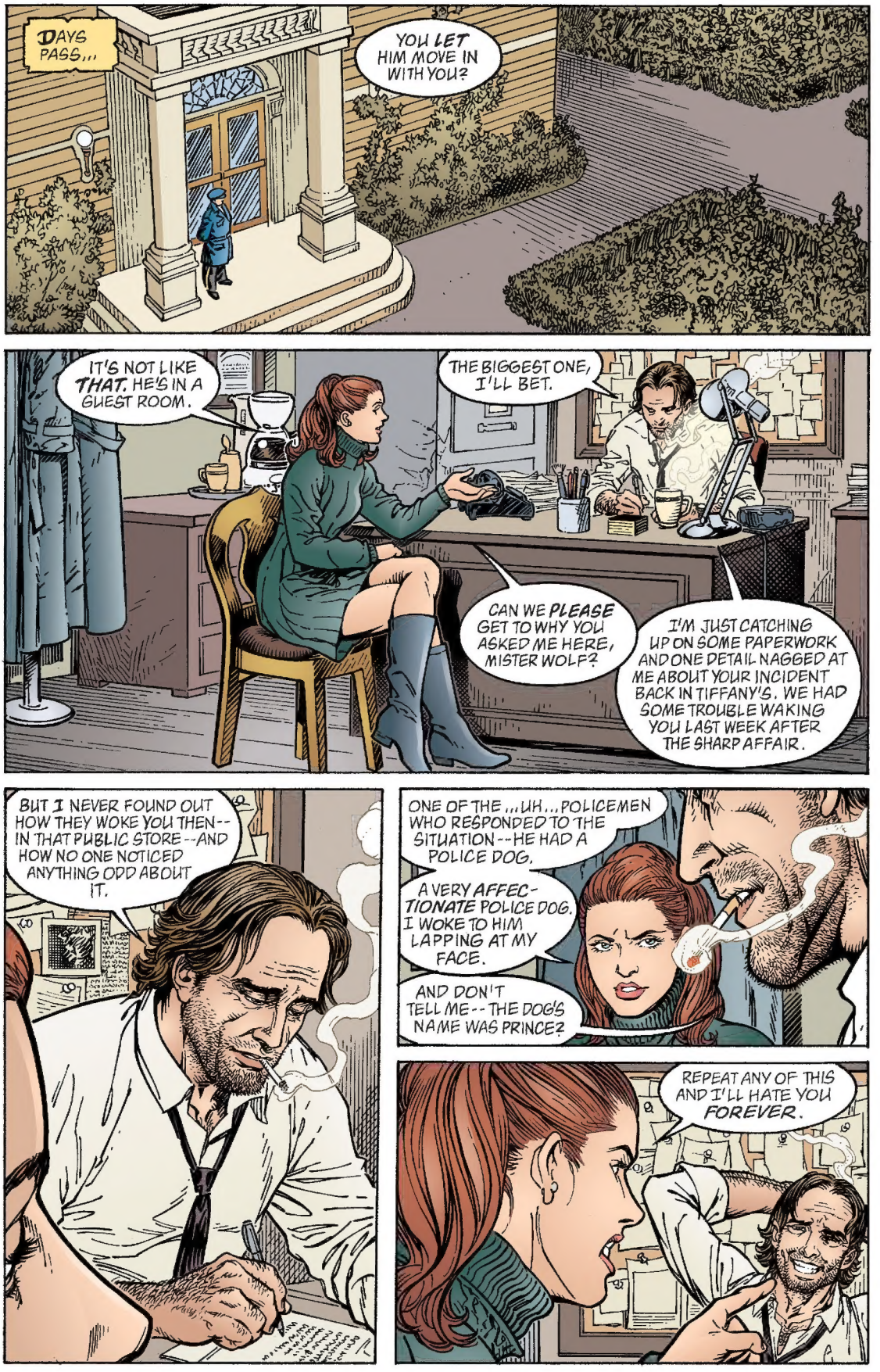

YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME. THIS KIND OF THING -- EVEN AN ACCUSATION THAT'S LATER PROVED ENTIRELY FALSE -- RUINS PEOPLE FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.
YES IT DOES. BUT IF YOU'RE EVER TEMPTED TO FEEL SORRY FOR YOURSELF, REMEMBER THAT YOU DID YOUR PART TO CREATE THIS CULTURE.
WELCOME TO THE WORLD YOU MADE, YOU PATHETIC LITTLE MEDIA FUCK.
WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?
NOTHING.
GO BACK TO YOUR LIFE AND FORGET ALL ABOUT US, FOREVER. MAKE SURE NO ONE EVER FINDS OUT ABOUT US, EVEN AFTER YOUR NATURAL DEATH -- IF YOU CARE ABOUT HOW YOU'RE REMEMBERED.
COME IN HERE, JACK.
AFTER THIS PIECE OF SHIT GETS DRESSED, ESCORT HIM OUT AND PUT HIM IN A CAB. MAKE SURE HE TAKES THE VIDEOTAPE AND ALL OF HIS DIRTY PICTURES WITH HIM.
SURE THING, SHERIFF.
YOU'LL WANT TO TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT THOSE, TOMMY, EVERY TIME YOU'RE TEMPTED TO PLAY JOURNALIST AGAIN.
IF YOU PUBLISH, WE PUBLISH. SIMPLE AS THAT.

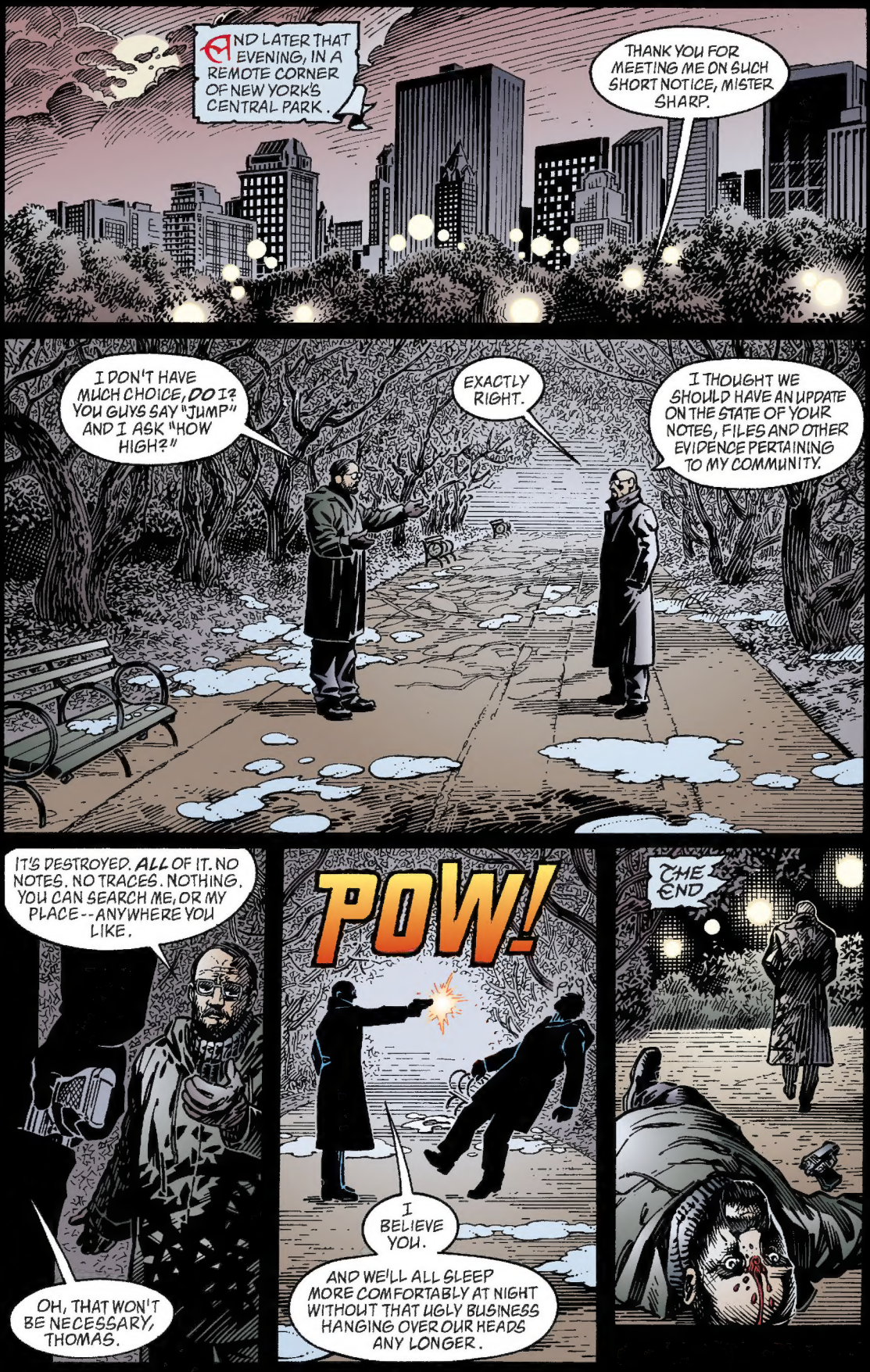
AND AT THAT MOMENT,,,
GOLD-PLATED MOOREWOOD AND BERMAN BATHROOM FIXTURES.
VENETIAN MARBLE TILES AND COUNTER-TOPS.
ETRUSCAN STATUARY.
SUNG DYNASTY CERAMICS. OH, BRIAR, MY LOST LOVE--
--YOU HAVE DONE WELL FOR YOURSELF.

I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD BE GETTING UP YET, BRIAR, DEAR.
YOU NEED TO LIE DOWN UNTIL YOU FEEL BETTER AGAIN.
I'M OKAY. JUST A LITTLE DISORIENTED IS ALL.
MY SLEEPING SPELLS SOMETIMES LEAVE ME FEELING THIS WAY.
THAT'S FINE. YOU'RE SAFE AND AT HOME AND IN GOOD HANDS.
WE'LL JUST SIT HERE UNTIL IT PASSES.
WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?
SOMEONE HAD TO STAY TO LOOK AFTER YOU.
WHY ARE YOU SMILING LIKE THAT?

"NO REASON. JUST AN AMUSING LITTLE SOMETHING SOMEONE TOLD ME RECENTLY."
I GOT ALL THE SECURITY TAPES. NOW WE JUST HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEM TO FINISH UPSTAIRS.
LOOK AT HER, FLY.
SHE ALWAYS DID LOOK HER BEST WHEN SHE WAS SLEEPING.
SHE IS REAL PRETTY, MISTER CHARMING. AND RICH TOO.
THAT ALWAYS HELPS.
SERIOUSLY? BRIAR ROSE GOT OUT WITH HER FORTUNE INTACT? I NEVER HEARD THAT.
NAW, SHE SHOWED UP HERE AS POOR AS THE REST OF US. BUT THAT DIDN'T LAST LONG.
REMEMBER ALL THOSE FAIRY BLESSINGS SHE GOT ON HER CHRISTENING DAY? ONE OF THEM WAS THAT SHE'D ALWAYS BE WEALTHY. WITHIN A YEAR OF ARRIVING HERE SHE MADE A KILLING IN THE STOCK MARKET. BIG MAGIC, Y'KNOW?
DO TELL.
IF SHE GAVE IT ALL AWAY TODAY, SHE'D PROBABLY WIN THE LOTTERY TOMORROW.
WHO'S SHE SEEING THESE DAYS?


WHY ARE YOU SUDDENLY BEING SO NICE TO ME? WHAT ARE YOU UP TO?
IT'S NOT ALL THAT SUDDEN, DEAR. WE JUST HAVEN'T SOCIALIZED SINCE ESCAPING THE HOMELANDS. I KNOW WE ENDED OUR MARRIAGE BADLY, AND IT WAS ENTIRELY MY FAULT. I WAS UNFIT FOR THE HOLY STATE OF MATRIMONY.
BUT SINCE THEN I'VE BEEN INFECTED BY THE SPIRIT OF THE GENERAL AMNESTY, WE'VE EACH TAKEN A PUBLIC STAND ON THE SIDE OF FORGIVENESS AND A NEW CLEAN SLATE.
BUT THAT DOESN'T APPLY TO...
AND YOU ARE TO BE ADMIRED MOST OF ALL, BECAUSE YOU AND I BOTH KNOW YOU'VE HAD THE MOST TO FORGIVE.
I HAVE TO CONFESS, I FIND MYSELF IN AWE OF YOUR GENEROSITY OF HEART.
BUT...
MY THOUGHTS EXACTLY. BUT I CAN'T JUST BLITHELY ACCEPT YOUR FORGIVENESS AND MOVE ON WITHOUT ANY ACT OF CONTRITION ON MY PART.
THE OLD PRINCE CHARMING MIGHT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO, BUT THAT MAN NO LONGER EXISTS.
I'M RESOLVED TO EARN WHAT YOU'VE SO FREELY GIVEN ME.
AND AS MY PENANCE, I'M GOING TO STAY HERE WITH YOU--NO, NOT ROMANTICALLY--THOSE DAYS ARE PAST US NOW. I NO LONGER DESERVE THOSE GLORIES.
SO I'LL STAY HERE PLATONICALLY, IN ONE OF THE OTHER BEDROOMS, AND TAKE CARE OF YOU.
SEE YOU THROUGH YOUR SPELLS, FOR MONTHS, YEARS, OR DECADES--AS LONG AS IT TAKES TO WORK OFF MY DEBT.
BUT...


DAYS PASS...
YOU LET HIM MOVE IN WITH YOU?
IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. HE'S IN A GUEST ROOM.
THE BIGGEST ONE, I'LL BET.
CAN WE PLEASE GET TO WHY YOU ASKED ME HERE, MISTER WOLF?
I'M JUST CATCHING UP ON SOME PAPERWORK AND ONE DETAIL NAGGED AT ME ABOUT YOUR INCIDENT BACK IN TIFFANY'S. WE HAD SOME TROUBLE WAKING YOU LAST WEEK AFTER THE SHARP AFFAIR.
BUT I NEVER FOUND OUT HOW THEY WOKE YOU THEN--IN THAT PUBLIC STORE--AND HOW NO ONE NOTICED ANYTHING ODD ABOUT IT.
ONE OF THE ...UH... POLICEMEN WHO RESPONDED TO THE SITUATION--HE HAD A POLICE DOG.
A VERY AFFECTIONATE POLICE DOG. I WOKE TO HIM LAPPING AT MY FACE.
AND DON'T TELL ME--THE DOG'S NAME WAS PRINCE?
REPEAT ANY OF THIS AND I'LL HATE YOU FOREVER.


AND LATER THAT EVENING, IN A REMOTE CORNER OF NEW YORK'S CENTRAL PARK.
THANK YOU FOR MEETING ME ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE, MISTER SHARP.
I DON'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE, DO I? YOU GUYS SAY "JUMP" AND I ASK "HOW HIGH?"
EXACTLY RIGHT.
I THOUGHT WE SHOULD HAVE AN UPDATE ON THE STATE OF YOUR NOTES, FILES AND OTHER EVIDENCE PERTAINING TO MY COMMUNITY.
IT'S DESTROYED. ALL OF IT. NO NOTES. NO TRACES. NOTHING. YOU CAN SEARCH ME, OR MY PLACE--ANYWHERE YOU LIKE.
OH, THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, THOMAS.
POW!
I BELIEVE YOU.
AND WE'LL ALL SLEEP MORE COMFORTABLY AT NIGHT WITHOUT THAT UGLY BUSINESS HANGING OVER OUR HEADS ANY LONGER.
THE END

NAHGA